

His last phone call

He was just 23 years old and had his whole life ahead of him. He made his last phone call to his mother - her only son. This was a phone call that no mother should ever have to receive. A mother who carried a miracle, a treasure in her body, nourishing it for nine months, should never have to endure such a heart-wrenching cross. His message was clear cut. He was doing it. He said goodbye and he did it.

Hundreds came to his home all day Sunday to sympathize with his parents. Hundreds more gathered today in the church where he served Mass as a teenager to say their own silent "goodbyes." Words failed everyone. People's presence tried to fill the vacuum for the family. Songs were sung that tried to be uplifting but nothing could cure the pain etched on his parents faces and that of his sister. A life ended. A light snuffed out. A great chasm left in its place.

I joined four other priests for the concelebrated funeral Mass. I knew that, no matter what words the main celebrant would use in the homily, he could not alleviate the heartache and pain of the family seated in the front row. He begged to ask the question, "Why?" knowing that there was no easy answer to what lay hidden deep in the heart and mind of the young man, nor was there any easy answer from a God that could be translated, in consoling and reassuring strength for the days, weeks and months ahead.

I, too, had found myself in the same situation as a priest many times as I wrestled to find words, strength and comfort for a grieving family. Words always fail us at such a tragic time. Nothing can take away the pain. Even faith seems shattered at such a time, yet, that same faith challenges us to look deeper into the darkness and mystery of life, love and tragedy.

I watched some of the young men of his age who came forward for Communion. Dressed in white shirts and dress pants, they seemed lost, forlorn, rudderless and helpless in their grief. Even though they were numbed by the sudden and tragic death of their friend, they carried their own questions and crosses deep within.

Following Communion, I listened to the Communion meditation song the family had chosen. It may not have been liturgically appropriate, even in church, but it did speak to the feelings, questions and aches of the worshippers. The song was "Let it be" by the Beatles. Ironically, the words had a haunting ring of truth to them.

"When I find myself in times of trouble, Mother Mary comes to me speaking words of wisdom, let it be And in my hour of darkness she is standing right in front of me Speaking words of wisdom, let it be Let it be, let it be, let it be, let it be Whisper words of wisdom, let it be."

As I listened to the words, I thought of Mary standing by the cross of Jesus at Calvary. It was her "hour of darkness." She, too, was being invited to "let it be." Don't try to figure it out. Trust, that even in a moment of darkness, there is a hope.

"And when the broken hearted people living in the world agree there will be an answer, let it be. For though they may be parted, there is still a chance that they will see there will be an answer, let it be.

And when the night is cloudy there is still a light that shines on me shine until tomorrow, let it be I wake up to the sound of music, Mother Mary comes to me speaking words of wisdom, let it be Let it be, let it be, let it be, yeah, let it be There will be an answer, let it be Let it be, let it be, let it be, yeah, let it be whisper words of wisdom, let it be."

Some keep their darkness and doubts hidden from even those they love. Some think it unmanly to share a cross, a confession, a depression. Some think that such sharing might be met with uncaring or not being taken seriously. Most take their secret to the grave, leaving those left behind to wonder, "Why?"

Maybe, some day, there will be an answer but it may take another lifetime to discover.